

Proper Tree & Shrub Pruning

A few minutes spent pruning is one of the best things you can do for the shrubs and trees in your yard. Yet it is one of the most neglected tasks around the home. Why? Well, because for most of us . . . we do not know how! Much like cutting your own bangs, you are really tempted to do it, but you are often sorry you did!

Keep reading! You'll be happy to learn that everything you need to know is in this OSU Fact Sheet [HLA-6409](#). Please read in its entirety if you plan on pruning. To whet your appetite, here are some highlights.

Tools and Materials

The illustration below shows all the tools the homeowner will need for proper pruning. If a power saw is needed, hire a professional arborist who is insured against personal injury and property damage.

Store equipment in a dry room. Keep it sharp and in good operating condition.



(1) lopping shear (2) hand pruner (3) folding saw for tight places (4) bow saw for limbs and (5) leather gloves.

When to Prune

In general, the best time to prune most plants is during late winter or early spring before growth begins.

There are exceptions to this rule, such as all spring-flowering trees and shrubs. They should be pruned as soon as the flowers have faded in the Spring. This is because spring-flowering plants form their flowers during the summer and early fall. Summer, fall, and winter pruning will remove flower buds thus destroying the spring flowering display. Plants that fall into this category include crabapple, flowering quince, forsythia, viburnum, wisteria, azaleas, and hydrangeas . . . just to name a few.

OSU [Fact Sheet HLA-6409](#) will give you more examples for when to prune each type of shrub and tree.

How to Prune

First, never remove more than one-third of the branching system of any tree or about two-thirds of a shrub or vine in any given year.

Pruning should follow a definite plan. Consider the purpose before the cutting process begins. By making the pruning cuts in a certain order, the total number of cuts is reduced greatly. Begin by removing all dead, broken, diseased, or problem limbs by cutting them at the point of origin or back to a strong lateral branch or shoot.

Next step is to make any training cuts needed. By cutting back lateral branches, the tree or shrub is trained to develop a desired shape, to fill in an open area caused by storm or wind damage, or to keep it in bounds to fit a given area.

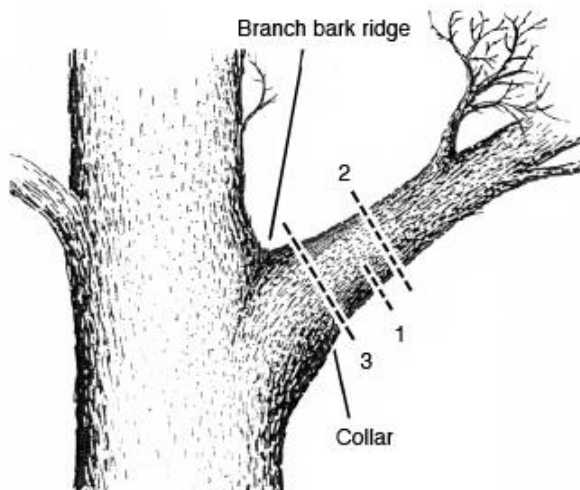
Remove water sprouts (fast-growing shoots often perpendicular to stem) unless needed to fill a hole or to shade a large limb until other branches develop.



Water Sprouts

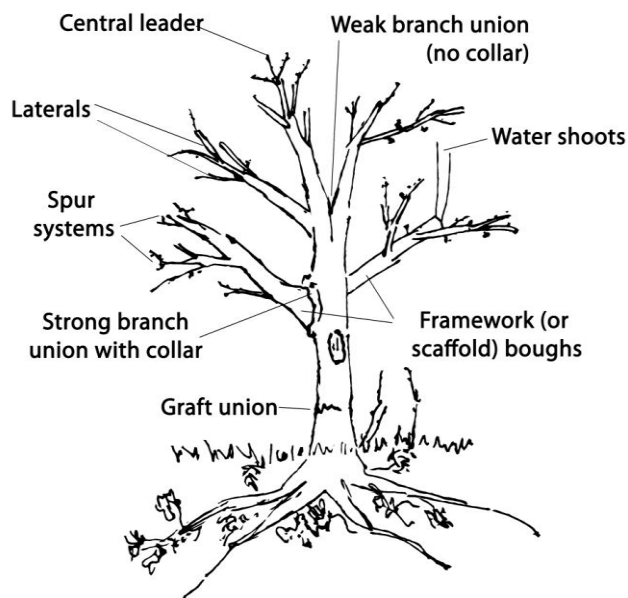


A properly pruned tree is never obvious. If it becomes necessary to remove a large limb, do so as illustrated below. If you do not follow these three steps, the weight of the limb will split the limb at the halfway point and rip or peel the bark (and possibly some wood), leaving a gaping wound. This is true even on smaller limbs.



Do not cut flush to the trunk, even in the absence of branch collars. Instead, remove limbs with bulges (branch collar) flush to the bulge, not flush with the trunk. For limbs without the swelling/bulges, remove almost flush with the trunk.

“Prune to the outside” is a typical statement in pruning articles. This means prune so the shoots after growth will grow away from the center of the plant. Be sure to study the position of buds on the limbs before you prune.



Remember that buds become flowers, leaves, or twigs. Larger buds tend to be floral. Bud position determines the angle of the limb or twig and its direction of growth.

Therefore, either remove the limbs that are growing toward the center of the plant or cut back to a larger bud pointing outward from the stem toward the outside of the tree or shrub.

Reading the entire [Fact Sheet HLA-6409](#) will make you a shrub/tree Whisperer and give you the confidence to try those bangs again!

For details on shaping and training trees, see Extension Fact Sheet [HLA-6415](#).